1: Hoebel E-5 (1933) 1940 NO6 Comanche NO6

ABNORMAL CONDUCT

On a less-than-legal level there are forms of social conduct which are definitely in violation of social norms and yet not viewed in the eyes of a people as behavior that calls for explicit sanctions. Such acts, though disapproved, society is willing to leave to the implicit sanctions of public opinion and the desire of the individual to stand well. The off-the-norm behavior described in this section is of this order. 626

ILLEGITIMACY

Comanche attitudes towards illegitimacy show no vindictiveness, though the feeling prevailed that every child should have a recognized father. Illegitimacy was declared by all informants to have been rare. Premarital sex relations were common enough, and abortion was not unusual, but in case of childbirth it is asserted that the father married the mother willingly. If the father did not come forth voluntarily and his identity was known, the parents of the girl are said to have gone to him with friendly talk to persuade him to marry the daughter. In cases of doubt (multiple possibilities), informants say paternity was determined on the basis of physical resemblance between child and supposed father: or if the child was old enough, it was determined by whom the child chose as its father. It is stated that if the father was not known, the girl was not usually married to another for a long time after the birth of her child, for the father could come and claim his child at any time. The problem-set was not to punish the mother, but to properly provide for the child. 848 [836] [847]

That's It gave a history which is typical of the Comanche attitudes.

Case 33. Illegitimacy
Informant: That's It

"An unmarried woman had a child. She said she would never be able to take care of that child, so she thought she would get rid of it. Accordingly, she took it to a grove and there washed it up and laid it on a bed of sage leaves. Pretty soon a young man came out to tend horses. He found the little baby lying there. He looked at it and picked it up and wrapped it in his blanket. He turned back home with it. Just as he stepped through the door of his tipi the baby cried. The brave's mother, who was there, looked up, 'Did I hear a baby?'

" 'Yes,' said the youth, 'here's my son.'

" 'What a burden!' the mother cried.

"But her son insisted on keeping it, so they took the child to a wet nurse. They gave her presents in payment for feeding the baby. Later on they bought corn meal from the Mexicans to feed it. When the boy was three years old, his father told his mother and father that he wanted to go on the war-path. He was gone for a year.

3:Wallace & Hoebel E-4, 5 (1933,1945)1952
NO6 Comanche NO6

VI

From Cradle to Grave

THE Comanche infant was born into a world of adults who welcomed and cherished it. It was not looked upon as a nuisance or handicap, but rather as a valuable addition to the tribe. Girls were accepted, but boys were preferred. Some families made a practice of painting a black spot on the door of the tipi if a newborn child was a boy, as a means of informing the people that the tribe had been strengthened by the addition of another "brave." Although the motherly affection that was the child's due was bestowed upon both male and female, boys received greater care than girls from their mothers and more indulgence from both parents all along the line.

There is conflicting opinion about twins. The woman who bore twin boys might be honored; other parents might regard twins as unnatural. Sometimes the parents attempted to destroy one or both of them, particularly if one or both were girls, but the more common practice was to give one away if foster parents could be found. For fear her husband might destroy both, the mother would sometimes dispose of one and not inform her husband that she had given birth to twins. In the eighteen eighties Dr. George Holley discovered and saved an infant, which was one of twins, buried in sand by its mother. There is at least one other recorded instance of such a rescue.[1]

Infanticide also seems to have been practiced in case the infant was born deformed, diseased, or a weakling. The attending women

[1] Annie M. Barnes, *Matouchon: A Story of Indian Child Life*, 11.

3: Wallace & Hoebel E-4. 5 (1933, 1945) 1952
NO6 Comanche NO6

847 and the medicine woman made the decision. If it was determined that the child was unfit to live, it was left out on the plains. If the tribe was on the move, it was left near the camp site; otherwise, it was carried a distance from camp and left to die. Well-informed observers claim that they never saw an idiot or congenitally deformed 854 Comanche in the early days.[2]

During its first days the child lay swaddled in robes in its mother's lying-in hut where it received constant attention. Soon after the mother left the hut to resume her daily round of tasks, the baby was put in its day cradle, or "papoose board," so that it could be stood out of harm's way or, if the mother was out gathering seeds or roots or on the march with the camp, it could easily be carried along on her back.

The cradle-board was either a sort of basket made of rawhide fastened to a flat, angular board or a soft buckskin sheath that laced up the front and was anchored to a back board. In cold weather the baby was wrapped in his cradle in blankets with a small opening left for breathing and for the dark, gleaming eyes. Getting babies in and out of their tight cradles to keep them dry would have been a great nuisance. The Comanches met this problem by bringing the little boy's penis out through an opening in the lashings and by providing a draining tube between the legs for a girl. Soft, dry moss was used to catch their excrement. Even so, the babies got wet and messy, but it was their lot to put up with it until they were transferred to the night cradle. Then they were washed, greased, and powdered—the powder consisting of pulverized dry rot of cottonwood. This soothing operation was done tenderfully and carefully. Bodily physical contact was thus restricted during the early months of life, and muscular activity almost wholly so. Such restriction was on a twenty-four-hour basis at first, for at night the young infant was rolled up in a stiff rawhide tube so that it could sleep on the robe between its parents without danger of being smothered if its fat mother rolled over on it. In this setting it enjoyed a snug, if not luscious, protective intimacy with both parents that was generative of strong security feelings.

Nine or ten months passed before the child was allowed out of the

[2] Marcy, *Adventure on Red River*, 167; Babb, *op. cit.*, 140, 142.

3: Wallace & Hoebel E-4, 5 (1933, 1945) 1952
NO6 Comanche NO6

595 on the march, unless menstruating, when he carried it himself. In fact, however, plural wives tended to reduce the domestic drudgery of all through a sharing of labor.

A man with only two or three wives and not too many children kept them all in one tipi. An important man's wives ordinarily lived apart, however, each woman having her own tent for herself and her children. Among the poorer families when wives were sisters, they sometimes used only the one tipi and possibly one bed for a time, but they always constructed separate tipis as soon as possible.[20] The opening of these tents was on the main tipi which was occupied by the husband. Long buckskin strings, attached to the buffalo mattress of each woman, were laid under the fold of the tent into the tipi of the husband so that he could instantly summon any one of his wives.

163 Comanche women were not very prolific, and death of the mother
842 at childbirth was not uncommon.[21] The average birth rate seems
847 scarcely to have exceeded two children to each woman, and it was a rare case when there were more than three or four born to one woman. Births were far apart, and the newborn were usually small. Many women were barren. Contraceptives were unknown to the Comanches, but abortions were practiced by beating the belly with stones. Hard physical work and constant horseback riding also apparently induced abortions so early in pregnancy that they went unnoticed.

844 Giving birth to a child was ordinarily a simple affair. Cases have been reported of women on the trail dropping behind the group, giving birth to their children, and then after a few hours rejoining the group on the march.[22] Under normal conditions, however, natal preparations were made. If a woman had her own tipi, she might use it; but if it was used by other members of the family, a separate lodge was constructed. In the summer it would be of brush about eight feet in diameter and six or seven feet high. Inside the lodge the earth

[20] Informant: See How Deep the Water Is.

[21] R. N. Richardson, "The Culture of the Comanche Indians," Texas Archeological and Paleontological Society *Bulletin*, I (1929), 63.

[22] Burnet, "The Comanches and Other Tribes of Texas and the Policy to Be Pursued Respecting Them," *loc. cit.*, 234; Humfreville, *Twenty Years among Our Hostile Indians*, 182.

9: Gladwin E-5 (1940) 1948 NO6 Comanche NO6

though this was not invariable. There was apparently no ceremony connected with adoption. 597

An illegitimate child was a great shame to all members of the family, and especially to the girl's brother, whose prestige was to some extent a reflection of that of his family. It was usually brought up by the girl's mother, whom it would call mother. Some pressure was put on the boy by the girl's parents to marry her, but he could not be forced to do so. The girl's family referred to him teknonymously, but his family apparently did not recognize the relationship at all. Her marriage possibilities were somewhat reduced by this unfortunate happening, and she might well become only a secondary wife of some older man. 848 [558] [551]

Twins were not wanted, and were generally considered a danger to the mother, as well as to all her blood kin to a lesser degree. This was especially true as they grew up, suggesting the effects of the gradual emergence of the child's personality discussed above. Some women, with the assistance of powerful names for the children, disregarded this belief and raised them together, but others disposed of the younger twin. If some woman did not come and offer to take one, it might be laid outside the tipi somewhere, where someone invariably came to get it. The mother attempted to forget it. If one twin died, all the clothing and other things which had been prepared for it were buried with it, and the mother or her sister made a round of the camp collecting what was offered in the way of other clothes. 845 [184] [847]

Among the parents' siblings, there is a definite emphasis on the mother's side. The mother's sisters were apt also to be married to one's father and, even if not, were usually around the family helping if possible. The mother's brother is also considered to be a source of guidance, assistance, and favors of fairly major proportions; it is significant that he, also, is permitted to give away a girl in marriage. As usual, behavior toward more distant parents, aunts and uncles depends on personality and propinquity; whether or not they have any children of their own is also often of importance. TY's father remained with her mother's family to marry two more sisters, so that she was brought up in the midst of a great number of maternal relatives. The members of this extended family were rather strikingly unprolific, so that she had very few even distant siblings; as a result she received a great deal of attention and an almost continuous stream of extremely valuable gifts from all her parents, aunts and uncles, even though related in very roundabout ways. Her younger brother, incidentally, became a favorite child according to the best institutionalized patterns. 604 593

Husband-Wife. Wives were very clearly dominated by their warrior-husbands, and acceded to their wishes in all matters, including the treatment of children. Men could, and often would, beat their wives on any pretext they chose, while a wife's infidelity frequently led to extremely harsh treatment, 593 684

31: Jones E-5 (1967-1970) 1972 NO6 Comanche NO6
Oklahoma

175 178 624 man, if he was fortunate, could become a peace chief, but a peace chief possessed no real authority and functioned most importantly as a mediator in the disputes which arose among the younger men.

175 178 224 [789] [621] [222] With the greater food supply offered by the seemingly boundless bison herds, hunting magic decreased in importance. Antelope magic did persist from the Shoshone heritage. The more favorable living conditions and constant food supply also allowed the individual bands, which had retained their Basin characteristics, to become larger and to achieve a greater degree of independence from their sister bands. The emphasis on the buffalo as a food source also tended to decrease the importance of gathering and exploitation of the floral environment for food. Further, the Comanches made little or no use of fish and of such small game as rabbits (Lowie 1954:6).

175 178 [897] [727] [562] [591] [304] The Basin Shoshone practice of infanticide disappeared as the family group could more efficiently care for its offspring. The practice of enculturating slaves and captives became common among the Comanches in order to augment their numbers and specifically to free males for hunting and warfare. The stress on war and hunting also tended to debase the position of women, and such practices as the mutilation of wives, a custom which had never occurred in Basin Shoshone culture, came into practice.

175 178 771 [776] [715] [775] [794] [578] [721] [796] Patterns of religious belief and behavior also underwent certain changes from Basin life to the Plains. A vaguely defined belief in a Great Spirit persisted, as did the relative lack of concern with the afterlife. However, the intense fear of ghosts held by the Basin Shoshone diminished in the Comanche Plains culture. Also, the practice of power transmission from individual to individual, instead of power source to individual, developed in importance. The decrease in ghost fear and, it is assumed, witchcraft in Comanche culture, as opposed to the Basin culture, was greatly facilitated by the lessening of intrasocial tensions and the Comanches' ability, through warfare, to turn aggressions outward and away from the primary group. As a whole, Comanche religious patterns were exceedingly simple and lacking in elaborate ceremonialism and ritual, at least compared to their Plains neighbors (Hoebel 1940:83).

175 171 [621] [575] 796 291 [342] The Comanches possessed characteristics, other than their paucity of ceremonialism, which served to differentiate them from other Plains tribes. The Comanche bands were more self-managing than bands found among other Plains groups. Warrior societies a diagnostic trait of Plains culture, were lacking in Comanche society except in the most rudimentary form. The Sun Dance was not a vital aspect of Comanche culture. Decoration of clothing with beads, quills, and ornaments of bone, shell, and metal was deemphasized, while heavy fringing of the garments was the rule. The Comanche tepee was built on a four-pole base like that of the Blackfoot, Sarsi, Ute, and Shoshone; while the Comanches' historic neighbors, such as the Kiowa, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Kiowa-Apache used a three-pole foundation (Lowie 1954:33).

72 [225] By the early nineteenth century the bison herds were greatly diminished on the south Plains, and the Comanches increasingly turned to raiding to augment their economy. During this period the Comanches raided New Mexico, the Santa Fe Trail, northern Texas, and Old Mexico, sometimes as far south as Durango.